

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS**

**KAROLINE MARTINS GIRARDI
COAUTORA: SIMONE SARMENTO**

**GRADED READERS AND LITERACY: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICAL
IDEAS**

**PORTO ALEGRE
2016**

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS**

**KAROLINE MARTINS GIRARDI
COAUTORA: SIMONE SARMENTO**

**GRADED READERS AND LITERACY: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICAL
IDEAS**

Monografia apresentada como requisito para
obtenção de grau de Licenciatura em Letras
– Língua Moderna – Inglês pelo Instituto de
Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio
Grande do Sul – UFRGS.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Simone Sarmento

**PORTO ALEGRE
2016**

RESUMO

Este trabalho tem o objetivo de discutir os benefícios de utilizar *graded readers* em sala de aula, como forma de transformar neoleitores em cidadãos letrados, capazes de participar ativamente na sociedade. Além de apresentar duas experiências diferentes com relação ao uso de literatura simplificada na sala de aula, que por sinal são relatos da minha própria experiência como professora e de um outro artigo, há também algumas seções sobre como escolher o *graded reader* correto, o formato destes livros, os testes de proficiência oferecidos por algumas editoras e como o nível é estabelecido.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Letramento. Graded Readers. Nivelamento.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the benefits of using graded readers in the classroom, as a manner of turning neoreaders into literate citizens who are able to participate actively in society. Besides showing two different experiences of using simplified literature in the classroom, which by the way are reports about my own experience as a teacher and about another paper, there are also some sections concerning how to choose the right graded reader, the format of these books, the placement tests some publishers offer and how the grade is established.

KEYWORDS: Literacy. Graded Readers. Leveling.

SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Using Simplified Texts	6
2. LEVELING	9
2.1 Placement Tests	11
3. CHOOSING THE RIGHT GRADED READER	14
4. THE BENEFITS	16
5. PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR GRADED READERS.....	19
5.1 A successful experience.....	19
5.2 My experience.....	21
6. CONCLUSION	26
7. REFERENCES.....	27

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of literature accepts many interpretations. Besides books, other texts like newspapers, magazines, comics, flyers, and speeches can fit into this broad category. Teaching English through literature can be engaging; it depends only on the way that teachers will approach it.

Working with different literary genres enable students to become readers of the world: it is beneficial for them to build their world knowledge, and it allows them to acquire a wider world view. In addition, they can start to participate more actively in society because of their appropriation of certain language practices.

Among all literary genres, this paper will focus on fictional literary texts. More specifically, on simplified texts usually known as graded readers, simplified readers or abridged books. In this study, I shall use all these terms interchangeably.

The definitions for this type of texts are plentiful. On the one hand, the Extensive Reading Foundation¹ (ERF)² defines Graded Readers as “books of various genres that are specially created for learners of foreign languages. They may be simplified versions of existing works, original stories or books that are factual in nature.” Accordingly, Macmillan publisher (2014) affirms that these simplified texts “are short books and audio books, encompassing both fiction and non-fiction genres, which have been specially written or adapted with the language learner in mind, so they will find them quick and easy to read.”

Abridged books, in short, are books which grade the language, vocabulary, style and content of every book in order to make sure that the English language learner will be able to profit from its reading. On the other hand, there are some initiatives, which do not focus specifically on foreign language learners, but on *neoreaders*³.

According to Fischer (2012), the neoreader can be considered a multifaceted subject: they are people who carry different life trajectories and experiences, but have no intimacy with books. These subjects vary from teenagers to adults who, for several reasons, gave up school and years later came back to become literate either for personal satisfaction or to enter in the job market.

¹ “a charitable organisation whose purpose is to support and promote extensive reading.” (Claridge, p. 114)

² Available in: <<http://erfoundation.org/wordpress/graded-readers/>> Accessed on November 10th.

³ In Portuguese, *neoleitores*.

The use of literature in the classroom as a way of encouraging English teaching can be very meaningful because it is through literary texts that neoreaders can improve their imagination. Sometimes there is a sort of resistance from the students to let their imagination flourish, since most of the times the reality they face everyday is harsh. For this reason, reading classics might be helpful in this sense: neoreaders will be able to perceive how writers from those times exercised their imagination as well. There is a tendency to relate the term imagination with something magical, which is not true. When I mention imagination here I mean the possibility of expanding horizons, larger than the place students are inserted.

Besides, classic stories never lose their essence: even though classic books were written centuries ago, the messages they carry never stop making sense, and this is why they are part of the literary canon. The generic plots lead the readers to relate themselves with the characters and their feelings. More than imagination, there is information, and instruction. Political movements, wars, life perspective of the time, regional identity, among other issues that are transposed into stories that apparently do not have much to say beyond the fictional plot.

For the initiated readers it may be less difficult to get the information behind the story. Neoreaders, however, are not likely to have the same sensibility with the literary texts, as they were not trained on how to read them appropriately. In the next section, I will explain what simplified English is, the kind of language found in abridged books, and how embracing its usage can be.

More than instructing how to choose a graded reader properly, this paper aims to show two successful experiences using graded readers in different classrooms, to prove that it is possible to work with literature in a foreign language in public schools/universities, and that students from different educational settings are able to read and comprehend a whole book in English, and extract important issues from their readings as well.

In this paper, I will discuss the importance of using simplified texts as a manner of conveying neoreaders to become literate (1.2), the problems of leveling (2) and how the grade is made (2.1), what is important to observe whenever teachers decide to work with graded readers in the classroom (3) and the benefits of using these books (4). Finally, there are two examples of practical usages of abridged texts in the classroom (5 and 5.2), both reports of previous experiences from teachers of an additional language.

1.1 Using Simplified Texts

As already mentioned, abridged books are short original stories that belong to the literary canon (the classics), and, consequently, make the story accessible to readers who have a basic knowledge of a language. Besides, there is the possibility of using an original story, i.e, books that were created specifically to facilitate reading and to turn the process of reading into something motivating. It is not a known story, like the classics, and it may vary among “romance, thrillers, action tales” (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 117), etc. Accordingly, original stories are most often created for lower levels, which are A1 and A2.

Therefore, publishers, along with the writers, study carefully all the linguistic features that are going to be included in the story, in order to create the right book for the right reader. The writer “changes the vocabulary, modifies the order of some information, cuts a longer sentence into two or three shorter ones, takes off irrelevant characters and episodes to the plot, etc.”⁴ (FISCHER, 2012, p. 12)

Even though the use of adaptations in the classroom have been successful in different contexts as reported by Silva (2015) there is criticism about these simplified books. One of the arguments is that when a classic is adapted, there is a great disrespect towards the original writers (FISCHER, 2012; HILL, 2008, p. 185).

Still, abridged books can be seen as a form of continuity; the beginning of a literate life. Fiction can be a very good way to stimulate students. According to Hill (*apud* Silva, 2015) the advantages of fiction would be the context, which is universal, and the combination of narrative and dialogue, which is much easier to read than the expository prose.

It is part of the teachers’ role to go beyond the short texts that textbooks offer. According to Silva (2015) teachers should

“integrate in a contextualized manner the literary reading in additional language classes, creating tasks that explore the text comprehension and the critical positioning of the student in relation to the text, instead of just exploring the lexical and grammatical aspects of the text.”⁵ (SILVA, 2015, p. 78)

Besides, teachers should also be aware of the process students have to go through in order to become a fluent reader. From the beginning of the process up to the end, there are multiple intermediate points which we tend to forget, and that interfere on the outcome of this

⁴ “muda o vocabulário, altera a ordem de alguma informação, reparte uma frase mais longa em duas ou três menores, tira de cena personagens e episódios irrelevantes para o enredo, etc.”

⁵ “Integrar de forma contextualizada a leitura literária nas aulas de língua adicional, criando tarefas que explorem a compreensão do texto e o posicionamento crítico do aluno com relação ao texto e não só explorem aspectos de vocabulário e gramática da leitura.”

process, depending on some issues that Fischer (2012) very clearly points out: the “access to the book, the living conditions, familiarity with reading, experiences offered by the school, age, emotional maturity, adequacy of the books offered to the horizon of the candidate as reader, the existence of familiar and social stimuli, etc.”⁶ (p. 9)

These simplified readers are all very similar in terms of structure: very often they have illustrations that can vary from drawings to real photographs; the vocabulary used is usually repetitive, and there are limited structures presented. The leveling, on the other hand, differs a lot from one publisher to another, as we shall see on the following sections. Learners of a second language are exposed to a broad variety of books that are graded and whose focus is not the age of the reader, but their level of English. In linguistic terms, these texts are categorized by the level of complexity regarding syntax and the lexicon used in the books, rather than by a selection of plots that best fit to a specific age group.

Accordingly, any reader can read Robin Hood, for example, but through different language levels, what may lead to a story more full of details or a briefer one: it will depend on the number of words in the story and on the structures used as well. But how are these learners of English as an additional language going to know their level of proficiency, according to the publisher’s parameters of categorization? How are these parameters established? This is what I shall explore on the following sections.

⁶ Acesso ao livro, condições de vida, familiaridade com a leitura, experiências proporcionadas pela escola, idade, maturidade emocional, adequação dos livros ofertados ao horizonte do candidato a leitor, existência de estímulos familiares e sociais, etc.”

2. LEVELING

“If the purpose of reading is enjoyment then the grading of readers is particularly vital so that learners are not discouraged when faced with a text that is clearly too hard for them to read fluently.” (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 112). In relation to this statement, Macmillan Guided Readers publisher, one of the most important publishers of graded readers for foreign neoreaders, seems to be aware of the need for an easy leveling standard in order for the neoreader to be able to choose books according to their language proficiency. Therefore, Macmillan (and other publishers as well) provides a table in the back cover of all their graded books (Figure 1), that measures the level of proficiency in additional language the new reader might have in order to achieve success on their reading.

If we look at the chart, we can see that there are two different terms for each of the English levels: the terms in the head of the chart, which might be unreliable because there is not a pattern among the publishers on how to grade their books correctly, and the terms placed on the first line of the chart, which go according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF).

Figure 1 – Key level

STARTER	BEGINNER	ELEMENTARY	PRE-INTERMEDIATE	INTERMEDIATE	UPPER INTERMEDIATE	LITERATURE COLLECTIONS
A1	A1	A2	A2-B1	B1	B2	C1
300 words	600 words	1100 words	1400 words	1600 words	2200 words	Original, unadapted short stories

Extracted from Macmillan Education (2014), p. 2

The CEF, which is “a practical tool for settling clear standards to be attained at successive stages of learning and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner”⁷, emerged from the need to have a standard concerning the proficiency of additional languages in Europe and, afterwards, in the rest of the world. This need for a standard is very comprehensible when, after some research, I realized that the problem of grading correctly starts right from the lowest levels of proficiency (A1 and A2).

While Macmillan considers Starter/Beginner and Elementary level as the equivalent to A1/A2 in the chart, Oxford Bookworms collection considers both these levels as only A1

⁷Council of Europe. Available in: <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp>. Accessed on December, 12th.

degree. Penguin Readers, in turn, even created another term to refer to a level that comes before the Starter: Easystarts; and instead of naming the levels as the other publishers do, Penguin divides the levels as Level 1, Level 2, and so forth, until Level 7.

Even though there is CEF standard to describe the degrees of language learning, still it is not so easy for learners of a second language to select a book that should correspond to their linguistic competence. As the levels of proficiency are classified according to the number of words the books have, according to Claridge's research (2012), it was possible to affirm that there is no consensus in the number of headwords⁸ selected for each of the levels. In relation to level A1 in the CEF, the number of headwords provided by Oxford Bookworms and Cambridge Readers is 250, but Macmillan considers that 300 is the right number to enable learners to achieve the following levels more easily (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 112):

Figure 2 - Oxford Bookworms (Grading chart)

Level	Headwords	CEF
Starter	250	A1
Stage 1	400	A1/A2
Stage 2	700	A2/B1
Stage 3	1000	B1
Stage 4	1400	B1/B2
Stage 5	1800	B2
Stage 6	2500	B2/C1

Source: the author

Figure 3 - Penguin Readers (Grading chart)

Level	Headwords	CEF
Easystarts	200	A1
Level 1 (Beginner)	300	A1
Level 2 (Elementary)	600	A2
Level 3 (Pre-Intermediate)	1200	A2
Level 4 (Intermediate)	1700	B1
Level 5 – (Upper Intermediate)	2300	B2

⁸ Headwords are understood as the words that repeat all over the story, placed purposely in a context, in order to make the neoreader to habituate with them naturally, leading to an effective learning afterwards.

Level 6 (Advanced)	3000	C1
--------------------	------	----

Source: the author

Therefore, if the learner is not sure whether they are A1 or A2, for example, the publishers also offer an online leveling test for the student to check the selection of books that best fits their needs, based on their score. After analysing the tests offered by Oxford University Press, Macmillan and Longman Pearson Penguin publishers, it was possible to observe some important points (the tests' format, whether the questions are contextualized or not and the purposes of the tests), that are going to be discussed in the next section.

2.1 Placement Tests

Taking a look at three different tests offered by Penguin Readers, Oxford University Press and Macmillan. The first thing I could notice is that the placement test from Penguin Readers is the most different in format from the others: instead of providing online tests, Penguin leaves the tests for download, in pdf format. The tests are photocopiable documents with 30 questions each, and all the questions are structured in the multiple choice format. At the end of the test there is an answer sheet, similar to a chart, where the student should mark with an "X" the corresponding answer to each one of the questions.

The tests provided by Penguin Readers are very useful for the teachers who might prefer to proctor the proficiency test in the classroom, not only because they can be printed, but because there are two versions of each test. For example, if the students do a placement test for level 1, there is test 1A and 1B. According to Penguin, these subdivisions were made as a retest: if the majority of students do not achieve the minimum score on test 1A, there is a second chance provided, but with different questions.

This kind of placement test is beneficial because it gives teachers the possibility to evaluate their students according to the results and, later, to choose the best graded readers for their neoreaders. On the other hand, it can be a little bit embarrassing for the students to receive a bad score on their test. A bad performance on the test can lead the students to a stronger resistance towards the learning of an additional language.

Oxford and Macmillan have positive points concerning this aspect. Since these publishers provide online tests, students may feel more comfortable by answering the questions and, in the end, to accept their final grade. The online test provides a certain

autonomy for the students as they are able to reflect on their score on their own, and to feel encouraged to read the abridged books recommended for their level.

The questions in all the publishers follow the same format. It is required that the students fill in gaps with one option that best fits the sentence. These gaps vary from loose words to short structures. Since this paper will focus on the use of abridged books in public schools, and the average level of the students' proficiency is A1, I will bring examples from this level as well. Below, on Figure 2, there is an example taken from Penguin Readers' test, that illustrates what was previously mentioned about the exercise model:

Figure 4 – Penguin reader's placement test

- 5 Which boy ?
 A Mary likes B do Mary like C does Mary like
- 7 Anne has a son. name is Edward.
 A Her B His C Their

Taken from http://www.penguinreaders.com/pdf/downloads/placement-tests/test_1.pdf

While question 5 requires a certain knowledge of the Present Simple structure, question 7 asks to fill out the gap with the right pronoun. The problem with those kinds of questions is that the sentences are presented out of context. Therefore, this test is measuring the ability to understand grammar structures, and not reading comprehension. For that reason, I think that the test format is not appropriate for the purpose of leveling learners for graded readers, since neoreaders may understand the general idea the sentence is conveying, but not know that "His" is the correct pronoun, for instance. As they are going to be graded according to the number of hits, they might feel they are not capable of understanding English at all.

Oxford, on the other hand, contextualizes the questions with a short story, paying attention to the linguistic features presented at each level. As soon the reader starts to get an idea of what the story is about, what they have to do is to, again, fill in the blank spaces with the word that best fits the sentence. For the same reason as Penguin stated, Oxford also provides two options of test – test 1 and test 2.

Considering that there are different learning styles, Macmillan shows a different strategy in their online test: for each question there is an image related to the word that should be chosen to complete the sentence properly. For example, in the sentence "It is _____

today.”, it is provided a picture of a couple wearing winter garment. Then, for a visual person it may be easier to connect the word with the picture, and consequently remember the right answer.

Not all the questions fit the “fill in the gaps” model; sometimes the question is a direct question, demanding a full answer. For example, in the question “What are the cats doing?”, the expected answer for the student to choose would be “They are sleeping.” The tests are very short, with 7 questions each. Different from Oxford and similar to Penguin, Macmillan does not take into consideration the context of the sentences used in the tests.

In sum, given the analysis of the placement tests, it is possible to conclude that the publishers do not focus on the Student’s reading skills, but on their grammatical knowledge of the target language, which is usually the main concern schools have about English classes, but which do not cater for neoreaders needs.

3. CHOOSING THE RIGHT GRADED READER

Even though the publishers, along with teachers and writers, take into consideration the proficiency level of their readers whenever they are simplifying a story, it is not enough, because of the different perceptions the learners, the teachers and the publishers have in relation to graded readers. Claridge (2012), in a study conducted in 2011, interviewed twenty-five language learners, questioning “what made them enjoy a book” (p. 107). Surprisingly or not, most of the answers were about the story and how the learners could relate with one of the main characters, leading them (the readers) to the world of the book, where their imagination was required. In Claridge’s words (2012), “[t]he learner’s answers indicated that they were interested in how the reading made them feel *during* the reading event rather than what they might extract from the reading *afterwards*.” (CLARIDGE, p. 107)

In respect to this assertion, it is important to create expectations and to explore “any emotional or affective aspects of reading” (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 107). The student has to become sensitive towards reading, otherwise they will not take any personal pleasure from literature, leading them to total frustration. What is more, they may acquire an aversion to books in general, preventing a further rescue to the literary world.

The process of selecting a book that should be suitable for a specific group of students is more than just looking for the number of headwords found on the back cover of the simplified readers. Teachers must be aware of their students’ age and interests before choosing the text genre and the plot of the story. Thus, the textual category is an important element to pay attention to whenever you decide to work with abridged books.

According to Claridge’s research (2012), the genre has to be clearly defined, and the subjects should be flexible. For example, there is no need to hide themes like HIV or racism from the students. On the contrary, it is very important that polemic issues are emphasized, so that they can reflect upon the subject by themselves, and discuss later in class. The more learners can relate to the topics, the more interested they will become. The way the story is conducted is also part of the analysis’ process, so according to Macmillan, the construction of the plot “must be simple: their stories must be linear with no flashbacks, confusion or multiple narrators” (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 111).

In fact, the process of becoming a reader ends up becoming even harder if the plot is not clear. Too many characters and stories within a story may be confusing for a neoreader, who is having their first experience with a real book. For that reason, Fischer (2012) brings the idea of putting an author’s note, the summary of the story and a character’s list in the

beginning of the book, in order to facilitate for the neoreaders. Hence, if learners forget who Cleonte is, for instance, in “Oedipus King”, they would be able to come back to the first page and check it out on the list. Thus, teachers should be aware of these details when deciding which book they will choose for their students.

Fischer (2012) also brings the idea of inserting illustrations throughout the book, to fix some of the most important imagetic scenes, what may help materialize the plot for the neoreader.

The discussion regarding the use of classics’ adaptation and the avoidance of original texts, i.e, texts created to work “as vehicles for learning literature” (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 111), is very pertinent. Some publishers agree with the creation of such texts, while others completely disagree. The argument of those who dislike the use of originals as an instrument of literacy is that the originals, i.e, books created specifically to be graded readers, are more “culture-free” (*ibid*, p. 111) and have a “simpler plot” (*ibid*, p. 111), rather than the classics, which “have a certain cache and respectability” (*ibid*, p. 111), as well as a good story that will stand the test of time”. (*ibid*, p. 111)

The divergence of using an original book or the adaptation of a classic may not interfere much in the outcome if teachers devote their time planning the books will be used in each classroom.

In addition, teaching grammar through literature can be an interesting approach as Ataide (2016) points out:

“literature, whose role is not restricted to provide pleasure to people, can also conduct them to linguistic peculiarities, because these two fields are articulated, not justifying the existing compartmentalization between them. It is important to point out that human beings interact and affirm themselves in the world through language, while literature influences the way men conceive the world.”⁹ (ATAIDE, 2016, p. 122)

Most of the students in public schools do not usually have access to these simplified readings and are not even aware they exist. An interesting thing to do would be the teacher’s initiative to insert the students into this context, choosing the readings at the beginning, according to their language knowledge, age, interests, and their reality, so that students could progress by reading upper levels afterwards, and later choose other titles on their own.

⁹ “literatura, cujo papel não se restringe em propiciar prazer às pessoas, também pode conduzi-las às peculiaridades linguísticas, pois essas duas áreas estão articuladas, não justificando a compartimentalização existente entre elas. É importante estabelecer que os seres humanos interagem e se afirmam no mundo por intermédio da língua, enquanto a literatura influencia o modo dos homens conceberem o mundo.”

To summarize what was mentioned on this section, there are three important points that cannot be forgotten whenever a teacher decides to use a graded reader in class, as it is shown in the chart below:

Figure 5 - Choosing the right graded reader

<p>Linear stories, with no flashbacks, stories within a story or multiple narrators.</p>	<p>The subjects should be flexible.</p>	<p>Teachers' awareness of their students' age and interests before choosing the plot and the text genre.</p>
<p>Work with the classics</p>	<p>Explore "any emotional or affective aspects of reading" (CLARIDGE, 2012, p. 107).</p>	<p>Books with illustrations, the author's note, the summary of the story and a character's list might be preferable.</p>

Source: the author

4. THE BENEFITS

The benefits of graded readers are plentiful. These abridged literary texts not only offer students the possibility of feeling proud of themselves by reading a whole book in English, but also provoke a critical sense upon students. Of course that this critical sense will not come alone: the educator has to mediate the conveyance of knowledge, preparing the students to be critics of their world. Considering logistics, school libraries may have some graded readers, however, they probably would not have enough copies for all the students. Photocopies do not make the reading interesting, because they are mostly black and white and the format is not like a real book. Another issue that restricts the opportunity to explore the use of graded readers is the fact that they all have copyrights, and to make copies of this type of material is to break the law and to be likely to be punished because of copyright infringements. Thus, it is important for the students to have an original book with them, (not necessarily a physical copy, since the publishers offer some titles online for free) to relate with the instrument and to become confident around books. It is all part of the process to become literate.

As mentioned in the Referenciais Curriculares (RCs), schools should not only encourage the habit of reading, but also lapidate a reader who takes pleasure on what is being read:

“Fruition is understood as the pleasure, the entertainment, the aesthetic appreciation of the world, the development of intellectual curiosity and the taste for knowledge; it is also understood as the attitude of those who seize the opportunities, and allow themselves to experience the multiple faces of human life.” (RGS, 2009, p. 38)¹⁰

Accordingly, the strongest point regarding these graded readers is that they are likely to instigate the pleasure for reading, and to encourage these teenagers to look for other books on their own because, as Coracini (2012) points out

“Using simplified readers is justified by allowing for the exploitation of more complex genres by the students themselves (in this case, the literary ones) and, also, allow the student to lose their fear of reading in English.”¹¹ (CORACINI, 2012, p. 20)

¹⁰ “por fruição entende-se o prazer, o entretenimento, a apreciação estética do mundo, o desenvolvimento da curiosidade intelectual e do gosto pelo conhecimento; entende-se também a atitude de quem se vale de oportunidades, e se permite vivenciar as múltiplas faces da vida humana.”

¹¹ O uso de livros adaptados é justificado por oportunizar, desse modo, a exploração de gêneros mais complexos por parte do educando (nesse caso, o literário) e, também, permitir que o aprendiz perca o temor de ler em inglês.

After a student manages to finish one of these books, their motivation for reading other sorts of texts might rise, and hopefully they will make it a habit. First, they have to experience how is it to be in the position of a reader; and afterwards, there will be a moment for them to evaluate whether the experience was enjoyable or not.

Of course the result of the process of becoming an effective reader comes with time, and it is normal to dislike a book, to abandon a reading permanently or temporarily, or give some time to read again after finishing a whole book. It is all part of the process of becoming a reader, but these effects can be reduced through adaptations. The abridged books can be used as the vehicle for this long road that is to become proficient in reading. They are important in the sense that they might encourage learners to try other kinds of reading, and to spend some time reading, purely for pleasure (DAY & BAMFORD, 1998, p. 7-8). Thus, it is right to say that the simplified literature supports the extensive reading approach. It takes some time for the students to get used to literature, so asking for students to answer pre and post Reading questions about the text will not help if teachers want their students to have a pleasant experience from reading. By turning reading into something joyful, the student will stop connecting books only to the school environment.

5. PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR GRADED READERS

In order to be successful, the use of a graded reader in the classroom should be considered as part of a bigger project that has to do with the plot of the book. In other words, to be effective, a context has to be set for the reading to be meaningful. For instance, if you want to work with identity, you not only have to look for a graded reader that includes this theme, but also develop a whole unit regarding the same theme, contextualizing then what is the main point of the text and the tasks as well.

Besides achieving pleasure from the readings, a student also should be able to understand what is it that the text is trying to say beneath the words. Schools have to prepare students for *literacy* but, most importantly, schools have to prepare students to be capable of operating in society according to the principles of being a citizen. According to the RCs (2009),

“by having these two elements as horizon – reading as a significative practice and the development of a critic attitude before the text -, the reading development supposes the contact among learners and a variety of texts from different genres. The range of genres offered for reading and the redemption of its social functions in pedagogical practice will ensure the student’s performance as a reader in different spheres of social life, arranging them to resort reading as a manner of facing life, of becoming a person, of exercising citizenship attitudes.” (RGS, 2009, p. 56)¹²

Every text has its purposes audience, according to the text’s social function (classified ads, newspapers, letters, utility bills, etc). Each discourse genre contains different linguistic elements for some reason, and a citizen of the world should be able to distinguish each text and to know what they should do with that information. Based on all that has been discussed, I will show two different experiences related to the use of abridged books in the classroom.

5.1 A successful experience

Silva (2015) reports on an experience using graded readers with a group of English students. She carried out a Project with basic students (A2) from Languages without Borders

¹² “ao ter esses dois elementos como horizonte – a leitura como prática significativa e o desenvolvimento de atitude crítica diante do texto -, o desenvolvimento da leitura supõe o contato entre os educandos e uma variedade de textos pertencentes a diferentes gêneros. A amplitude dos gêneros oferecidos para leitura e o resgate de suas funções sociais na prática pedagógica assegurarão a atuação do aluno como leitor em esferas distintas da vida social, preparando-o para lançar mão da leitura como forma de enfrentar a vida, de constituir-se como pessoa, de exercer atitudes de cidadania.”

Program (LwB) in a public university in the south of Brazil. The project gave students the opportunity to work with the book in a contextualized and creative manner. At the end of this project, students had to produce a video in the format of a book review, which would be watched by other people that were interested in the story. The theme of students' videos was free, they could decide to work with any topic they wanted, as long as they could connect the topic with the story.

The book was *The adventures of Tom Sawyer*, mainly because there were several copies of this book at the library and because it was the most simplified one, with 1.000 headwords on the story. In the first class, the group read the introduction and the acknowledgments together, in order to discuss about the intended audience and why the writer says it is not a story only for children. They also discussed some issues regarding the context related to the story, such as the time period, the city, the author's life, etc. Each of these topics were distributed to students in small groups. These groups went to the computer lab and researched about their topics. Later on, they presented their topics for the whole class.

It is important to mention that the students were the ones who decided not to read the book in class. So, in order to check whether they were reading the chapters at home, the teacher created a task for them to answer concerning both the plot and the characters of the book: the connection between each character and the main one, and the main events that occurred up to the point students had stopped.

In the third class, the teacher started to bring resources for students to base their final product. She brought some reviews published on The New York Times about some contemporary books. Every student had to analyze one review, paying attention to the format and to the language used and, later, they presented for the students the review they had chosen. It is clear that the teacher gave great importance to the development of students' speaking skills, by asking them to present a topic they had researched along the classes. Also, the teacher tried to practice presenting publically because that was exactly what they would have to do later on, with their final product.

In the fourth class, students watched a video in the computer lab, called "My favorite books of 2014". The video was chosen because the youtuber elicits 14 books that she enjoyed the most during 2014. Then, they should choose a book and explain their choice. By doing that, students would start to reflect about their own book review.

As an attempt not to lose the focus, the fifth class was about adaptations created based on that graded reader. Again, the students had to carry out some research on their own about

the different types of adaptations of the story, as an opportunity to use them as a start for discussion on their own video.

In the following class, the last chapter was read with all of them, in class. A positive point about this class is that, instead of reading out loud, the teacher used the audiobook that the graded reader provided. In class 7, students had to present their reviews. The time established was around 5 minutes. This was an interesting task because students could exercise what they were going to say in the final presentation (the video), and what they could improve. Each student should give a feedback for the classmates' presentations, according to a score criteria: fluency, consistency and the presentation itself.

The eighth class was reserved for the students to record the video. In the last class, students watched each other's presentation. The final product became a youtube video, which is available online. In the end of the project, students were asked some questions about the experience they had with the use of a graded reader in the classroom. The majority of students thought that graded readers were very useful to learn vocabulary aspects, grammar and to practice extensive reading.

5.2 My experience

In my experience, students also enjoyed to work with an abridged book. In my case, the book was a short story, and the level of proficiency of my students was A1. I knew that because the supervising teacher had already given them an English level test. Different from the report above, in which I mentioned in detail what happened in each of the classes, I will just describe some of the tasks used with my students. The story was "The monkey's paw", from Oxford Bookworms, containing only 400 headwords. The project took 10 two-period classes to be accomplished.

During my first practice in the English teaching course, I decided to work with a graded reader that I already had, and that I thought would be enjoyable for the group of students I was working with. This was a group of about 32 ninth-grade students. I decided to work with them in groups, because otherwise it would be too expensive to pay for 32 copies of the story. The students were split into 6 groups, by affinity, because they would have to work with the same classmates from the beginning of the project up to the end.

The groups had to choose a name that best represented them as a group, so that in the activities concerning the story they would be called by the name they had chosen, instead of by numbers. The story chosen is about a family that receives the visit of an old friend, who

had been in India for some years. The narrative brings a suspense tone, what I realized along the classes to be a very positive point.

In the story, it is night, and it is raining outside. The visitor brings a monkey's paw to the White family as a gift, warning them that the paw is magical and can grant three wishes. Even though the gift seems to be amazing because it is magical, the man seems very frightened about something. Nevertheless Mr. White accepts the gift and soon his old friend goes away. Each of the family members makes a wish – Mr. White, Mrs. White and their son Herbert – throughout the story, and with every wish accomplished, a consequence comes with it, but related to the wish made. For example, the worst consequence comes from Mr. White's wish: He asks for 2,000 pounds and, on the following day, he receives a notification that his son had just died at the factory and, as a restitution, the couple would get 2,000 pounds, the same amount of money Mr. White had wished for on the previous day.

To introduce the story, I worked with some terms like *superstition*, *beliefs* and *myths*, and asked for some examples. After that, I brought some real examples of superstitions people have, such as the association of the number thirteen with bad luck. In Brussels there is a company that had to remove their old logo because of the number of dots on it. They got very interested in the subject, and I handed out the news from BBC about other cases of superstition:

Figure 6 – BBC News

Last Updated: Wednesday, 21 February 2007, 15:02 GMT

[E-mail this to a friend](#) [Printable version](#)

'Unlucky' airline logo grounded

A new Belgian carrier, Brussels Airlines, has been forced to change its logo following complaints from superstitious passengers.

The 13 dots making up the stylised 'b' brought a flood of complaints about the "unlucky" design.

The airline, which formally launches on 25 March, said it was taken aback by the strength of feeling and felt obliged to respond.


It has now altered the design to incorporate an additional dot.

Brussels Airlines was formed from the merger of SN Brussels Airlines and Virgin Express.

Brussels Airlines spokesman Geert Sciote said: "They [passengers] said they were not pleased with an aircraft with a logo with 13 balls because they think it brings them bad luck.

"We are never surprised by reactions - but that it was that bad? It really took us aback," he said.

[E-mail this to a friend](#) [Printable version](#)



Taken from <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6383171.stm>>

After discussing the news, I asked them to imagine that they had an airline and, after that, to create the logo for their airline company. After they had finished, everybody had to present it for the big group, explaining their choice.

We agreed to read the chapters at home, just like what happened in Silva (2015). Then, after they went through the story, I worked with the *First Conditional* and superstition, as a matter of relating literature to language. To do that, I brought some examples of superstitions they were likely to know, and wrote the sentences on the whiteboard, according to the First Conditional structure:

If a black cat crosses your way, you will have bad luck.

Some time after asking them about the consequences of some superstitions, and writing their answers on the board, I asked them to elicit 3 other superstitions they would know that were not mentioned, using the same structure. In case they did not know much, I brought some pictures to illustrate the beliefs. At last, in pairs, they had to create one superstition whose outcome could be bad or good.

Since the story is full of irregular verbs in the past tense, I worked with them so that students could understand the story better. First, I asked them to circle the verbs they came across. After that, I asked them which verbs they selected and wrote them down on the board. I drilled the pronunciation and asked them to study those verbs at home because in the following class we would have a kind of championship. In the next class, they had to organize themselves into their groups and on a desk in front of them I put several cards faced down. On the cards, there were all the verbs from the previous class, but in the present tense, as the figure below shows:

Figure 7 - Cards



One person from each group should come to the desk and randomly pick up one of the cards, pronounce the verb, raise the card for their colleagues and tell the past form of that verb, as well as its meaning. In cases in which the representative of the group did not know

the answer, they could ask their group's colleagues for help. If still no one from the group knew the right answer, the first group to answer correctly would win that point.

When they came close to the end of the story, I took them to the school's video lab so that they could watch parts of episodes from "Once upon a time" series. The passages selected for the students to watch concerns one of the main characters, Rumpelstiltskin, and his moral lesson: "Every wish comes with a price". Based on that, I started a discussion with the students about the price that the White family would have to pay at the end of the story because of their wishes.

In the following class, I brought an excerpt found in Google books, from a novel called *One wish*. The part that I selected first gives some examples of what people might wish whenever they had the chance to do it, which is in poetry format. Later, there is the description of what Tanya, the protagonist of the story, wishes for, since the tree is able to grant only one wish for person.

Figure 8 – *One Wish*

*No changing the past, no future revealed.
Some things must remain concealed.
No exchanges, no guarantees,
So make your choice responsibly.
Every wish comes at a price,
Whether it's nasty or it's nice.
So what'll it be? Tea with the queen?
Wings for a day? Pay back someone mean?
Become stinking rich, win your true love's heart?
Grow taller, run faster, become super smart?
Talk to your dog or turn into a cat?
Eat chocolate all day and never get fat?
Find something lost, have beauty or youth?
Wish for a liar to tell the truth!
Walk on the moon, achieve instant fame?
One wish and the world could know your name.
Be sure to use your common sense.
Each wish comes with a consequence.
For wings are tricky to explain.
Fame means no peace for you again.
Riches come, but at what cost?*

The tree stopped. Stared expectantly. Yawned again and then hiccuped. Tanya was still at a loss for what to say, but now her mind was racing with possibilities. One wish!

What do I wish for?

The answer came almost immediately, floating before her like one of the wish bottles on the breeze.

I wish for Dad to come back. For him and Mum to love each other again.

Taken from <<https://books.google.com.br/books>>

Here, it was good to work with poetry, rhythm and the structure of the rhymes (AB, AB, etc) and also with some pertinent questions concerning the protagonist's choice and the outcome of her wish. This discussion led to other questions, such as what the students would wish for if they had the opportunity to ask for one single wish. Most of the students told that they would not ask for anything for them, because they gave value for the things they already had. Thus, they would ask for good things like, nobody in the world to be hungry, more peace and less wars, etc.

Before they could find out what would happen in the end of the story, I asked them to do their final project, which would be to produce a video of about 10 minutes, concerning the family's wishes and the end of the book. I made it very clear that they should create another version of the story; they were free to change the number of characters, the wishes that the family members made and their consequences. Also, as they did not know the final part of the story, they had to imagine what it would be, and perform the final scene on the video as well. Most importantly, they had to choose another magical object, rather than a monkey's paw.

The time in one of the classes was all spent with the groups' decision of what they would do on the video and the production of their words. They all agreed on recording and editing of their videos at home, because all the groups had at least one person who was able to deal with the video editor programs. In the last class, they all watched the presentations and, after that, the end of the story was read with them.

In a big circle, I asked them for some feedback concerning all the project. They answered that they found the plot very interesting, as well as the grammatical features worked in class. They were able to notice that their vocabulary had improved, referring to the headwords they learnt throughout the story, and they felt a great satisfaction about reading a whole book in English. It made them more confident and willing to seek for other titles, as they asked me where they could find other books like the one I worked with them. I evaluated them from the tasks they had done throughout the internship, along with their participation in the discussions. I was required to apply a test at some point of the internship, so according to their scores on the test it was also possible to verify that they had, in fact, understood everything.

6. CONCLUSION

I think that it is important to connect language with literature every time teachers see the possibility for doing this, because, in fact, working with both subjects together will bring more satisfactory results, and the classes will be more meaningful. It is also important to bring the context of the story for the tasks teacher might develop, so that students will be able to do wider connections between literature and their lives. More than that, they will develop a critical sense towards the world they live in. The feedback is an important tool for both teachers and students, because the former can reflect upon what they could do differently in order to improve their classes, and the latter will feel important in the sense that their opinion actually counts. Teachers and students working together mean academic success.

Since there is a huge problem in what concerns the leveling of simplified books, it is up to the teachers to analyze and choose the right graded reader for a specific group of students. We, as teachers, must be aware of our students' interests, language level and needs, so that the process of choosing a book may meet all those criteria.

7. REFERENCES

- ATAIDE, P. D. A leitura de textos literários nas aulas de língua inglesa: desencontros entre teoria e prática. *Revista X*, UFPR, v. 1, p. 118–137, 2016.
- CLARIDGE, G. Graded readers: How the publishers make the grade. *Reading in a foreign language*, New Zealand, v. 24, n. 1, p. 106-119, 2012.
- CORACINI, A. A. O uso de de Graded Readers no ensino de língua adicional na educação básica. *Monografia de conclusão de curso*. UFRGS: Porto Alegre, 2012. 50 p.
- DAY, R. R; BAMFORD, J. *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. 1st edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 240 p.
- FISCHER, L. *É só o começo*. Manual do Professor. L&PM: Porto Alegre, 2012. 38 p.
- HILL, D. R. Graded Readers in English. *ELT Journal* 62 (2) April. Oxford University Press. p. 184-204, 2008.
- JACOBS, W. W. “The Monkey’s Paw”. Oxford University Press, 1989. 56 p.
- RIO GRANDE DO SUL. Secretaria de Estado da Educação, Departamento pedagógico. *Referenciais curriculares do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul: linguagens, códigos e suas tecnologias*. Porto Alegre: SE/DP, 2009a.
- SILVA, G. L. O Uso de *Graded Readers* no Ensino de Inglês como Língua Adicional no Programa Idiomas sem Fronteiras. *Belt*, v. 6, p. 76-84, 2015.